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HEADLINE: SPEAKING FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN WORLDWIDE

BYLINE: (By Hillary Rodham Clinton); Hillary Rodham Clinton is first lady of the United States.

BODY:

Women comprise more than half the world's population, 70 percent of the world's poor, and two thirds of those who are not taught to read and write. We are the primary caretakers for most of the world's children and elderly. Yet, much of the work we do is not valued, not by economists, not by historians, not by popular culture, not by government leaders. At this very moment, as we sit here, women around the world are giving birth, raising children, cooking meals, washing clothes, cleaning houses, planting crops, working on assembly lines, running companies and running countries.

Women also are dying from diseases that should have been prevented or treated. They are watching their children succumb to malnutrition caused by poverty and economic deprivation. They are being barred from the bank lending offices and banned from the ballot box. Those of us who have the opportunity to be here, have the responsibility to speak for those who could not.

The truth is that most women around the world work both inside and outside the home, usually by necessity. We need to understand there is no one formula for how women should lead our lives, that is why we must respect the choices that each woman makes for herself and her family.

But we must recognize that women will never gain full dignity until their human rights are respected and protected. Our goals for this conference, to strengthen families and societies by empowering women to take greater control over their own destinies, cannot be fully achieved unless all governments here and around the world accept their responsibility to protect and promote internationally recognized human rights.

Tragically, women are most often the ones whose human rights are violated. Even in the late 20th Century, the rape of women continues to be used as an instrument of armed conflict. Women and children make up a large majority of the world's refugees. And when women are excluded from the political process, they become even more vulnerable to abuse.

I believe that, on the eve of a new millennium it is time to break our

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silence.

The voices of this conference and of women at Hairou must be heard loud and clear:

- It is a violation of human rights when babies are denied food, or drowned, or suffocated or their spines broken, simply because they are born girls.

- It is a violation of human rights when women and girls are sold into the slavery of prostitution.

- It is a violation of human rights when women are doused with gasoline, set on fire, and burned to death because their marriage dowries are deemed too small.

- It is a violation of human rights when individual women are raped in their own communities and when thousands of women are subjected to rape as a tactic or prize of war.

- It is a violation of human rights when a leading cause of death worldwide among women ages 14 to 44 is the violence they are subjected to in their own homes.

- It is a violation of human rights when young girls are brutalized by the painful and degrading practice of genital mutilation.

It is a violation of human rights when women are denied the right to plan their own families, and that includes being forced to have abortions or being sterilized against their will.

If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, it is that human rights are women's rights. And women's rights are human rights.

Let us not forget that among those rights are the right to speak freely and the right to be heard. Women must enjoy the right to participate fully in the social and political lives of their countries if we want freedom and democracy to thrive and endure.

The following is an excerpt from Hillary Rodham Clinton's speech before the United Nations 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing.

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